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## PRESS RELEASE

# 31 Individuals Involved in a Drug Trafficking Organization in Marion County and Lorain County Indicted

Thursday, June 22, 2023

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### For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Ohio

**CLEVELAND, OH** – Federal, county, and local law enforcement officials today announced that 31 individuals were charged in two separate indictments for their roles in drug trafficking conspiracies that involved the distribution of fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamine in the Northern District of Ohio, including in Marion, Wyandot, and Lorain Counties. Twenty-one were arrested during an early morning operation and transported to federal court in Cleveland.

This announcement is made by United States Attorney Rebecca C. Lutzko, FBI Special Agent in Charge Gregory Nelsen, and the MARMET Drug Task Force in Marion, Ohio. “Yesterday’s arrests and announced indictments will give the community of Marion, Ohio, some relief from the opioid epidemic that has been a persistent scourge in our District,” said United States Attorney Rebecca C. Lutzko. “These arrests reflect law enforcement targeting organizations that sell deadly drugs in our communities to hold those organizations accountable

for the lives they regularly destroy. The United States Attorney's Office will continue its targeted and collaborative efforts with our local, state, and federal partners to identify and dismantle drug trafficking organizations that bring poison and violence into our neighborhoods."

"FBI Cleveland and the Mansfield Resident Agency, together with its seven resident agencies across northern Ohio, is focused on identifying, investigating, and disrupting drug trafficking organizations and eliminating their operations," said FBI Cleveland Special Agent in Charge Gregory Nelsen. "The coordination of these arrests was highly complex and underscores the collaborative effort of the FBI, together with our partners in federal, state, and local law enforcement. We thank and appreciate their work as they continue to find criminal actors who seek to ruin lives and poison our communities through their expansive drug network."

The fourteen and eighteen individuals listed below, respectively, were charged in two separate multi-count indictments with the following charges: conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute and distribution of controlled substances, distribution of a controlled substances, possession with the intent to distribute controlled substances, and use of a communications facility to facilitate a drug trafficking offense:

Christopher Payne, 24, Marion, OH; Michael Worthington, G., 28, Marion, OH; Dave Davis, 43, Marion, OH; Matthew Taylor, 28, Marion, OH; Tyler Landrum, 26, Marion, OH; Dalton Gruber, 42, Marion, OH; Donovan Caskey, 28, Marion, OH; Crystal Rivers, 42, Green Camp, OH; Gerald Houseworth, 31, Marion, OH; Sheena Stolz, 34, Upper Sandusky, OH; Anthony Clark, 53, Marion, OH; Christina Weaver, 25, Marion, OH; Steven Mollet, 27, Marion, OH; Starla Artressia, 26, Marion, OH;

and separately,

Justin Stanley, 35, Marion, OH; Freddie Sanchez, 36, Lorain, OH; Christopher Payne, 24, Marion, OH; Dustin Russell, 32, Marion, OH; Walter Thomas, 41, Marion, OH; Austin Hogan, 29, Marion, OH; Kyle Rentschler, 26, Prospect, OH; Donna Wrick, 31, Marion, OH; Lawrence Dempster, 49, Marion, OH; Ryan Pheasant, 30, Marion, OH; Michael Cottrill, Jr., 22, Marion, OH; Casey Taylor, 47, Marion, OH; Derek Hesson, 29, Marion, OH; Jacob Martin, 28, Marion, OH; James Holsinger, Jr., 29, Marion, OH; Jason Smith, 47, Marion, OH; Jeffery Hall, 31, Marion, OH; and Dustin Freeman, 36, Marion, OH.

According to the indictments, between as early as on or about September 1, 2020, and continuing through on or about June 14, 2023, the defendants did knowingly and intentionally conspire with each other to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute a mixture and substance containing fentanyl, cocaine, cocaine base ("crack"), oxycodone, and methamphetamine.

The co-conspirators obtained fentanyl, cocaine, cocaine-base (“crack”), oxycodone, and methamphetamine from suppliers in Columbus, Ohio; Lorain, Ohio; and Marion, Ohio. The coconspirators concentrated their redistribution of these drugs in and around Marion, Ohio. During the investigation, law enforcement seized 3 kilograms of fentanyl, 2 kilograms of cocaine, over 1 kilogram of methamphetamine, 15 firearms, and \$25,546 in U.S. Currency.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial in which it will be the government’s burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. If convicted, each defendant’s sentence will be determined by the Court after review of factors unique to this case, including the defendant’s prior criminal record, if any, the defendant’s role in the offense and the characteristics of the violation. In all cases, the sentence will not exceed the statutory maximum and, in most cases, it will be less than the maximum.

For the past two and a half years, Marion-Metrich (MARMET) Drug Task Force and FBI Mansfield investigated the drug trafficking activities of the Justin Stanley DTO and the Christopher Payne DTO. Investigators and law enforcement officers of the Marion Police Department, Marion County Sheriff Office, Morrow County Sheriff Office, Lorain Police Narcotics Unit, Wyandot County Major Crimes Unit, Marion County Prosecutor’s Office, and U.S. Marshal Service assisted in the investigation.

This investigation is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Vasile C. Katsaros.

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